

REMARKS

In the February 6, 2004 Office Action, claims 1-4, 7, 8, 11-14, 17, 18, 21, 22, and 24-31 stand rejected in view of prior art. No other objections or rejections were made in the Office Action.

Status of Claims and Amendments

In response to the February 6, 2004 Office Action, Applicants have amended claims 1, 2, 4, 8, 11, 12, 14, 18, 22, 24-31, and have cancelled claim 23, as indicated above. Thus, claims 1-4, 7, 8, 11-14, 17, 18, 21, 22, and 24-31 are pending, with claims 1 and 11 being the only independent claims. Reexamination and reconsideration of the pending claims are respectfully requested in view of above amendments and the following comments.

Rejections - 35 U.S.C. § 103

In items 4 and 5 of the Office Action, claims 1-4, 7, 8, 11-14, 17, 18, and 21-30 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Japanese Laid-Open Patent Publication JP2000-035053A (Hashimoto) in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,128,972 (Cooke et al.). In response, Applicants have amended independent claims 1 and 11.

More specifically, independent claims 1 and 11 now clearly recite that the intermediate rotary member has a gourd-shaped hole with overlapping first and second holes that overlap and a protruding section that is an intersection of the first and second holes. Further, the friction mechanism has a pin that extends in the gourd-shaped hole. Moreover, the elastic member is configured to soften impact between the pin and protruding section.

Referring to Figures 7, 8, and 9 of Hashimoto, Hashimoto discloses a *single* elliptical hole 69. If one were able to interpret the hole 69 as having overlapping holes, the center of one hole would have to be inside the circumference of the other because of the smooth continuous curve of the periphery of the hole 69. Thus, Applicants respectfully assert that if

an elastic member were to be inserted between the pin 62 and the hole 69, the pin 62 would be unable to contact a protruding portion of the hole 69, which is defined as an intersection between the two holes of the hole 69, as recited in amended claims 1 and 11 of the present application.

As seen in Figures 1 and 17 of Cooke et al., Applicants respectfully assert that Cooke et al. disclose arcuate slots (412 in Figure 17) and not overlapping holes as recited in amended claims 1 and 11 of the present application. Applicants respectfully assert that since neither reference discloses the recited arrangement singularly, the combination also fails to disclose the recited arrangement.

Clearly, this arrangement is *not* disclosed or suggested by the Hashimoto reference and the Cooke et al. patent or any other prior art of record. It is well settled in U.S. patent law that the mere fact that the prior art can be modified does *not* make the modification obvious, unless the prior art *suggests* the desirability of the modification. Accordingly, the prior art of record lacks any suggestion or expectation of success for combining the patents to create the Applicants' unique arrangement of a damper mechanism.

Moreover, Applicants believe that the dependent claims 2-4, 7-9, 12-14, 17, 18, 21, 24-25, and 27-30 are also allowable over the prior art of record in that they depend from independent claims 1 and 11, and therefore are allowable for the reasons stated above. Further, the dependent claims are further allowable because they include additional limitations. Thus, Applicants believe that since the prior art of record does not anticipate the independent claims 1 and 11, neither does the prior art anticipate the dependent claims.

New Claim - 31

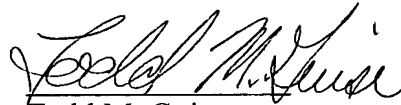
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Applicants have added new claim 31. Claim 31 depends from claim 1, thus, Applicants believe that claim 31 is allowable for the aforementioned reasons. Examination and Consideration are respectfully requested.

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In view of the foregoing amendment and comments, Applicants respectfully assert that claims 1-4, 7, 8, 11-14, 17, 18, 21, 22, and 24-31 are now in condition for allowance. Reexamination and reconsideration of the pending claims are respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,


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